

Old Santa Cruz

• • • By Ernest Otto

Few remain of the sycamore trees which were once outstanding among the native trees of Santa Cruz.

Pictures taken in the sixties show one sycamore as if close to the island near the mouth of the river. A single house shows in the section across the river, which was given over entirely to farming.

A native sycamore of immense size stood at what is now the intersection of Walnut and Pacific avenues. It stayed there several years after Walnut avenue was laid out in 1867 before it was chopped down in the seventies because it was in the way of horse and buggy traffic.

Made Good Butchers' Blocks

Back of the building at Pacific and Walnut, which was for a time the Drew candy store and later the Fitch butcher shop, stood another big sycamore. When it was cut down, because of its immense girth, cross sections of it were used for butchers' blocks.

Butcher shops of the seventies were lively places, where the butcher's day began at 5 a.m. to get meat ready for the shop and the delivery wagons, and ended at 8 p.m.

Another wide spreading sycamore stood back of the Captain Smith residence on Beach Hill, which fell to the axe when Major Frank McLaughlin erected Golden Gate Villa. The tree was on the hillside and when the Smith family lived there a platform was built in its spreading forks which, surrounded by benches, was used for entertaining guests.

Blackburn Sycamores

More sycamores stood at the foot of Sycamore street on the Blackburn property. The last to go was one close to the house. Its trunk had rotted at the base. Back of the Blackburn house, where is now Center street, was a lagoon of tules and bullrushes, with a number of sycamores. Beyond Laurel street at the end of Center was another sycamore grove, which has entirely disappeared. The only ones remaining in that part of the city are a trio on the Southern Pacific lot which once belonged to the Blackburns.

Stands Along River

Sycamores stood here and there along the San Lorenzo of which some remain in the camp ground east of the river above the Water street bridge. A few others are near the Odd Fellows cemetery.

Another stand of sycamores was along the river from Crossing street up to the Pedemonte gardens. The trees were allowed to stand when the land was planted to grain but were cut when the present cherry orchard was set out.

One sycamore also remains at Josephine street of a number which stood on the west side of the river above the present day El Rio camp ground. The Imus grove had its share of sycamores; it was where are now the Currier and Campbell cherry orchards and bulb fields.

Sycamore Grove

Just outside the city limits at the end of River street is the one remaining outstanding stand of this tree, known still, as it was three quarters of a century ago, as Sycamore Grove. It was owned then by the Cowell Lime company and was much in use as a private picnic ground because it was easy of access and afforded a good swimming hole. It is now operated by the Fridleys and was one of the first auto camp grounds. For many years a branch of a sycamore spanned the road there, so large that it was much photographed.

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